



*State Office of Rural Health
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**STATE OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
Friday, December 2, 2005,
Mercer University, Macon, Georgia**

Presiding: Wayne Martin, Chairman

Present: Charles Owens, Ex-Officio
Valerie Buchanan
Dianne Banister
W. Kent Guion, M.D.
James Hotz, M.D.
Pete Mills

ORHS Staff: Tony Brown
Sheryl McCoy

Visitors: Cassandra Ellsberry, Three Rivers AHEC
Kathy Ellis, Three Rivers AHEC, Director
Pam Reynolds, Sowega AHEC, Director
David Zammit, Louis Smith Memorial Hospital

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The regular scheduled meeting of the State Office of Rural Health (SORH) Advisory Board was held on Friday, December 2, 2005, at Mercer University, Macon Georgia. Chairman Wayne Martin called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. Mr. Martin welcomed everyone and asked for a brief introduction from each attendee. He thanked Andre Thomas and Gail Coleman for hosting the meeting.

Minutes of July 7, 2005, Meeting

The minutes of the July 7, 2005, Advisory Board Meeting was approved as submitted.

Wayne Martin – Reported that the important issues at hand are the same as those discussed at the last board meeting in July. A twenty (20) member Committee was appointed by Commissioner Burgess to study the allocation options of the Indigent Care Trust Fund. Mr. Martin was appointed to the committee and is working hard to see that small rural hospitals are treated fairly. From the 20 member committee a 7 member Technical Committee was appointed to work with data collection, and will report to the full Board.

The Technical Committee has sent a survey form to the hospitals asking for data and will hold three meetings across the state to educate hospital staff regarding the completion of the survey. There will be a meeting held at Crisp Regional Hospital, Cordele, Georgia, December 7, 2005, 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Attendance of the scheduled meetings is very important to assure the data is correct for the Commissioner's review. Commissioner Burgess stated the decision would be made without change in any of the data presented by the Technical Committee.

Mr. Martin reiterated the importance of the ICTF funds to small hospitals. He noted that distribution of the funds as proposed by Grady Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia, would result in a small change for large hospitals, but that small amount could keep the doors of small hospitals open.

Mr. Mills asked when the funds will go out.

Mr. Owens stated the funding distribution is being planned for June.

Dr. Hotz remarked that he was under the impression that the funds were supposed to be a disproportionate share to the hospitals.

Mr. Martin stated small hospitals that do not provide special surgical and other services that produce additional funds cannot offset the operational losses.

Dr. Hotz asked if the philosophy of the ICTF funding has changed. He shared that Phoebe in Albany does not receive additional funding from the county. The county has not allocated any dollars for healthcare.

Mr. Martin explained that the urban hospitals had a meeting and their approach to the ICTF allocation of funds is to take money away from small hospitals.

Dr. Hotz stated that the first amount allocated to Phoebe would have been good, but they lost money in the end because they do a large amount of indigent care. Dr. Hotz said there's an unfairness violating the basic principles of the plan. He asked, "Do we need to take a position to help?"

Mr. Owens stated that we haven't written a letter because of the resignation of Commissioner Burgess and the appointment of a new commissioner. A letter will be drafted in the near future.

Mr. Mills said this is the first year his hospital is receiving ICTF funds and the initial payment was to be \$275,000, but the final amount was reduced to \$115,000.

Dr. Hotz stated that it makes no sense to reduce funds from hospitals without cash reserve. He said this is a major problem.

Dr. Guion shared that the funds were first designed for the benefits to help rural hospitals. He stated that the vision is going backward.

Dr. Hotz asked, "Do we need a motion of support?" He recommended the motion, "*We support the process of the Indigent Care Trust Fund (ICTF) activity to keep rural hospitals strong and would oppose any actions that would cause an adverse impact on rural hospitals and the important roles they play in communities.*"

Mr. Martin talked about the disapproval he and other participating hospitals and State Merit participants have with the contract the State Health Benefit Plan gave to United Healthcare Insurance Company. He said that some hospitals already had contracts with United Healthcare and their contracts just rolled over into the present contract. The hospitals which did not have contracts with United were able to negotiate some of the negative conditions in the contract, particularly the issue related to accepting all United Healthcare business which is a policy of United Healthcare Insurance. He reported that Crisp Regional Hospital has signed the contract with United Healthcare.

Ms. Buchanan remarked that many of the insurance companies use aggressive marketing tactics; i.e., direct mailing to the elderly.

Mr. Martin remarked that the healthcare system in Georgia is broken. He said because of the short-term tenure of the Department of Community Health Commissioners, it has been difficult to keep the healthcare decisions consistent. It might be good to hire a non-partisan who would be able to stay in office for ten to fifteen years and have a history of knowledge for decision making. Mr. Martin stated the importance of making an effort in this legislative session to turn things around.

Mr. Owens gave a report on the State Office of Rural Health. He shared that additional staff is being added to the office; (1) Patsy Whaley, Hospital Services Director, (2) David Hartin, HPSA Analyst, (3) Rebecca Mullis, Program Associate, Nancy Fussell, Migrant and Homeless Program Director and Katrice Brown will be joining the staff on December 16 at Migrant and Homeless Program Operations Specialist.

The State Office of Rural Health (SORH) grant has closed for the year and is due for application for continuation on January 17, 2006. The amount received in the past years has been \$150,000, but will ask for \$200,000 in funding for 2006. The FLEX grant ended in August with \$198 unobligated funds.

He expressed that the proposed state rural definition will be presented to Commissioner Medows soon for her review.

Mr. Owens recently attended the Summit for a Healthier Georgia, initiated by the Georgia Public Health Department. Members of the Summit include a cross section of providers, business people, insurers, local leaders, boards of health, educators, faith based groups and general public. The Summit's main focus is to form partnerships to look at health disparities in Georgia. In developing ways to overcome these disparities, the Rural Health Plan should include (1) need and (2) availability of data so that progress can be measured. Health disparities to be monitored are; obesity, diabetes, infant mortality and Cardiovascular Disease.

Dr. Hotz remarked that the Health Summit is creating a group of people who are working to insure that rural areas are included in healthcare program development. There are geographic disparities that must be monitored in order to overcome them before they worsen.

Mr. Owens explained there is a significant difference in urban and rural areas and the rural differences need to be recognized and steps taken for improvement.

Ms. Buchanan shared that with people's busy schedules, it is sometimes difficult to make it to meetings, however, when you make the sacrifice, you realize how important it is to attend.

Mr. Owens stated that Berrien County has been recommended for Critical Access Hospital (CAH) status which will make 36 CAH facilities.

Mr. Owens shared that the Small Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP) ended in August and zero monies were carried over. The SHIP grant is due March 14, 2005. Current SHIP contracts are in the Commissioner's office for signature.

The Primary Care Office (PCO) grant is due January 13. A part of the PCO is the J-1 Visa program. The J-1 Visa program has received nine applications. The National Health Service Corp. has received 32 applications since May 2005.

The SORH is contributing \$5,000 to AHEC for the publishing of the Health Careers Book. AHEC is trying to raise \$50,000 for the book and he encouraged others to donate if they have surplus funds. Healthcare Georgia Foundation is providing 100% matching funds.

Mr. Owens announced there is a new physician program, Pauline Lindstrum, Director. The program will help create and develop appropriate policy and procedures. They will train volunteers and follow up with an audit.

Dr. Hotz asked the status of the SORH and managing its programs. Monies not being used in the past and concern they will be used in the future.

Mr. Owens SORH office going in right direction. Programs are not at risk for turning money back. There will be some monies carried over in the Primary Care Office because of vacancy in staff and money was allocated for staff salary.

Mr. Brown gave a brief update on the Health Professional Shortage Area program (HPSA). He explained the mandate given by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for a three year turn around for data collection. They realize some areas will lose their designation. This proves the program is working and physician slots have been filled so that there is no longer a shortage.

In the Migrant program, a waiver has been requested to change the monthly Advisory Board meetings to a quarterly meeting and the requirement that the Advisory Board members be comprised of at least 51% users be changed to MSFW representation. HRSA approved our waiver request.

The Migrant program has been providing Medical Interpreter's Training to outreach workers, Doctor's office staff, hospital staff and other related medical staff. The training is a 40 hour course designed to assist outreach workers with medical interpretation, health education, and cultural competence.

The SORH contracted with Draffin & Tucker, CPA, to develop a Financial Policy and Procedures manual for the GFHP. The manual will provide a uniform financial policy for all migrant projects. A marketing video and program brochure is being developed for the GFHP.

The SORH is looking to have a migrant enumeration study completed in 2006.

Mr. Brown will be attending the UDS reports training in Atlanta in January of 2006.

Mr. Owens gave the Board the dates of the Advisory Board meetings for the year 2006. They are as follows:

March 8, 2006
June 7, 2006
September 13, 2006
December 6, 2006

Mr. Thomas, REAP Program Director, gave a brief update. The REAP program will be reaching maturity on March 31, 2006. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will no longer provide funding for the program. Mr. Thomas will be attending a meeting in February to discuss the continuation of the work.

Pam Reynolds, Director AHEC, noted that with the educational opportunities for Physician's Assistants and Osteopathic physicians, there will be an increase in the number of students coming into Georgia. In reference to the statement made by Mr. Owens, is there a time table for collecting the needed data.

Mr. Brown advised that the time for collecting data is two weeks.

There being no further business or public comments, the meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Respectfully,

Wayne Martin, Chairman/Date

Sheryl McCoy, Recording Secretary/Date

Valerie Buchanan
SORH Advisory Board Secretary